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Guard, Reserve troops in Iraq deserve adequate equipment

In the wake of equipment shortages among National Guard and Reserve units in Iraq and growing fatalities, I have become increasingly concerned. Shortfalls in bulletproof vests and armored vehicles for our brave men and women in uniform motivated me and 49 members of Congress to introduce the Guard and Reserves Protection Act. The measure urges Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to address these deficiencies and protect our troops.



Betty McCollum
U.S. Rep., District 4

Over 60 National Guard and Reserve members have died and dozens more have been seriously injured in the war in Iraq.

Numerous Guard and Reserve units are being sent to Iraq without crucial items such as guns, kevlar vests and reinforced Humvees. Many of the Humvees being used by Guard and

Reserve units have not been strengthened to protect against enemy fire or roadside bombs, and reports indicate that 40,000 troops in the bat-

tle zone — many of them in Guard and Reserve combat support units — lack bulletproof vests. As a matter of policy, National Guard and Reserve troops have been given second-hand equipment no longer used by the active duty military.

Over 28,000 National Guard and Reserve personnel are currently serving alongside active-duty military in Iraq, making up more than a quarter of the American troops there. Just last month, an additional 15,000 Guard and Reserve troops were ordered to prepare for a possible yearlong tour of duty in

Iraq or Kuwait, bringing the total number of Guard and Reserve troops who have been alerted for possible service in the Persian Gulf region early next year to 58,000.

I have witnessed firsthand the concern from families of guardsmen and women lacking basic supplies. National Guard and Reservists are first-class soldiers fighting on the front lines, and they deserve better than second-class equipment.

Congresswoman Betty McCollum represents Minnesota's 4th Congressional District.